

## DO YOU LOVE JESUS?

John 21:1-25

Key Verse: 15

“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

John chapter 20 really seems like it could be the end of the gospel of John. Jesus visits his disciples and they were overjoyed (20:20). He then commissions them to go out and carry on the mission that God had given to him “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (20:21). And then he gives them the Holy Spirit to empower them for their work. They have their mission, they have the means to do it, they are full of joy, they are set. Then John says “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). The end! But then comes chapter 21 and it very much feels like none of the stuff in chapter 20 even happened, like we’ve stepped back. The disciples go back home, they are sort of directionless, I mean what happened? Simply receiving God’s mission and calling is not always enough. Often times we have failures and unresolved problems that get in the way of our relationship with Jesus and block us from the joy and freedom that he gives, so that we cannot do what he has called us to do. Thank God that Jesus always has the initiative to visit and encourage us in our times of need and restore us in his love and mission.

Part 1: Jesus graciously visits us in our failures (1-14)

Let’s read verses 1-3, “Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ‘I’m going out to fish,’ Simon Peter told them, and they said, ‘We’ll go with you.’ So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.” Most likely the disciples are in Galilee in obedience to Jesus’ command

to meet him there (Mt 28:10). Three years prior to this, Jesus had called the disciples at this very sea saying, "Come follow me" they immediately left their nets and boat and followed him (Mt 4:19-20,22). But now, here they were getting back into their boats. It becomes clear that something is amiss with them. When Jesus commissioned them in their previous meeting did he say, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you ...fishing?" When we compare this scene with the dynamic church we see in the book of Acts, where they were preaching boldly and thousands were being added to their number every day, it's hard to imagine these are the same guys.

Though Jesus had met them, still their failures as disciples loomed over them. They had abandoned Jesus at the most important time. The women and John had at least followed him to the cross, but the disciples hid, terrified in an upstairs room. Especially Peter must have been condemning himself after denying Jesus three times. Now there was awkwardness in their relationship. Have you ever experienced awkwardness with a friend or family member when there is something unresolved between you? Surely he was asking himself, did Jesus still love him? Was he angry with him? Would he punish him? His fears and doubts were like a wound blocking him from having the joy and peace Jesus had given and blocking him from serving Jesus as he should. Last week we thought about how sadness, fear or doubt, block us from seeing the risen Jesus. In the same way, we allow our personal failures to do so as well. Out of his love, Jesus illustrated what life without him is like, through an interactive life lesson of 12 straight hours of working hard and catching not even 1 fish! You know, Jesus often brings us to place where we're running into a wall, and nothing we're doing is working, so that we may draw near to him.

So, "Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No,' they answered. He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.' When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish" (4-6). They had all failed as disciples but Jesus did not abandon them in their failure. Do you abandon your children when they fail? When your Bible students fail, do you say, "don't bother coming anymore." Rather, we love them more in their failures. Jesus wanted to meet them in their failure and turn it to victory.

One young woman was a very promising disciple of Jesus, but when she committed a great sin, she couldn't overcome the shame of what she had done. It was tragic because everyone opened their arms to welcome her back but she couldn't come to Jesus and ran away. In contrast, one young man seemed very noble, sincere and pure-hearted among all CBF children, but his secret sin made him feel he was a slave. He came and tearfully confessed his sins saying that he knew he had let Jesus and me down and said "I know you're very disappointed in me." But he was wrong. That was exactly the place where Jesus met him and he met Jesus and was saved by Jesus his Liberator. We may believe that the greater our sin, the greater will be Jesus' anger with us and we avoid him. But Jesus wants to visit us in our failures.

This miracle is the only recorded miracle of Jesus after his resurrection. He did this very specifically to remind Peter of the promise he had made to him when he first called him. At that time Peter had fished all night but caught nothing. Jesus told him, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." When they did, the haul of fish was astonishing. Peter fell to his knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (This situation sounds pretty familiar doesn't it?) Then Jesus said, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people" (Luke 5:1-10). Jesus' calling and promise had never depended on their accomplishments or how worthy they were. Jesus had promised that HE would make them fishers of men. Their calling depended on Jesus, not on their failures. In Jesus, we can be confident that "he who began a good work in you WILL carry it on to completion" (Php 1:6 emphasis mine).

John had been there. He remembered the event and so he said, "It is the Lord!" Peter, true to his impulsive nature, decided it was not appropriate to meet the risen Jesus in his underwear and put on his clothes and proceeded to jump straight in the water and swim 100 yards (the length of a football field!) fully clothed, leaving the others to haul in the motherload by themselves—I'm sure they were really appreciative about that! I've tried to imagine the image of Peter standing there dripping from head to toe just staring in amazement at Jesus breathless from exhaustion—it sounds like a love story. Yet, though he surely arrived there first he doesn't seem to interact with Jesus, there seems to be a hesitation.

“When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish you have just caught.’ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ None of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish” (9-13). Jesus did not say, “Come and have breakfast...I mean if it’s not too much of a commitment ...that is if you’re not too afraid to be seen with me.” He didn’t bring up their failures or give them a lecture. To restore them he showed them grace. To restore them, Jesus served them. To restore them, Jesus even let them participate. To restore us, Jesus shows his one sided love. The beginning point of serving Jesus and carrying out his mission is Jesus’ love. Jesus’ love precedes everything we do for him.

“This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead” (14). Jesus visited over and over again. One time should have been enough but he graciously visited a second time for the sake of Thomas. That should have been enough but he visited a third time to restore them. Jesus visits as many times as is necessary to help us. Jesus’ love knows no bounds. Who have you visited recently? Is there someone who has run away? Who has denied Jesus? Who was full of fear instead of faith? Who is just living a practical life without Jesus? Let’s consider the grace of Jesus and visit and restore them in love.

Part 2: Jesus wants us to love him by loving his sheep (15-25).

After such a graceful breakfast prepared for them by the Lord, they were all filled physically and spiritually and restored in their love relationship with Jesus. But Jesus the good physician still had to touch the wound in Peter’s heart. After the meal, Jesus pulled him aside to have a private conversation as they walked together (20a). “Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs’” (15).

Jesus first asked Peter, “Do you love me more than these?” The last time that Jesus and Peter had spoken before this event, Jesus was eating his last meal with the disciples. Jesus clearly told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me.” But Peter replied, ‘Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will’” (Mt 26:31-33). Peter loved Jesus enough to give up everything to follow him. But in the end, Peter failed to love Jesus more than his own life. Now Jesus asked him, is it true, as you said, that you love me more than these other disciples? What could Peter say? Though he had tried to love Jesus by his human strength, out of his emotion, he failed completely. He knew he loved Jesus but it was not enough.

Second, Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Emotional love for Jesus is good, but God’s mature love expresses itself in action. We must love Jesus the way that Jesus loved God, that is through his obedience to his words and faithfulness to do his work. Why is feeding Jesus’ lambs love for Jesus? John 14:21 says, “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.” And John 12:26 says, “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where **I am**, my servant **also will be.**” Why have so many Christians down through the ages gone to such lengths to share their faith with others, to teach the Bible, translate the word into the most remote languages, and go to the ends of the earth? Why are the Christians the ones in Rome who picked the tossed away, deformed babies out of the garbage heap to care for them? Why are they the ones who took in the sick, the blind, the lame, who went to live in leper colonies? It is because they **love** Jesus. And Jesus told us to love him by feeding his lambs. We don’t get to pick and choose how to love him, he’s already told us the way. The question is: do you love Jesus?

In feeding his lambs, we must first realize that the lambs are not ours but they are HIS. Jesus used the word “lambs” because lambs are the most precious. Jesus entrusts his most precious lambs to us. Some people think that to feed Jesus’ lambs is a special calling that only some receive—that only Peter received this calling and no one else. But if early Christians thought that way, guaranteed we would not be here in this church today. We know that Jesus is calling us, because he will bring one of his precious lambs to us and ask us to care for them. We don’t get to pick and choose who we want. Often times he brings us difficult people so that we may grow in a humble shepherd heart like his. It takes time, effort and patience. His lambs may not look like what we expect. Jesus said in heaven he

would say to the saved, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me...Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:35-36,40). When we see someone who we realize we can help, who needs our care, it may feel like a big task to help them or you may feel you are not the right person or that you cannot possibly help. But the only question, the ONLY question is: Do I love Jesus? Jesus brought that person to you. It is a privilege and great honor that Jesus brings his most precious lambs to us.

One person shared the story of how her family had the opportunity to get free legal work done and decided to have a will drawn up. In the process the lawyer asked, “Who will be legally responsible for your children if you both die at the same time?” She realized they didn’t really have any close family members they could trust to take care of their kids and she felt a little sad. As they prayed, she thought about a friend and sister in Christ and prayed about it. Of course her relationship with her friend was not like that of Jesus and Peter so she didn’t ask her, “Do you love me?” Instead she told her “I have a big favor to ask and feel free to say no after you pray about it.” Later that day, her friend got back to her saying, “If anything happens to you and your husband, your children can come live with us. We will take care of them.” She was so moved by her friend’s words and cried a little. She was thankful to have a friend she could trust with her children even if she could not take care of them anymore. You know how hard it is to entrust our most precious little lambs to someone, how great an honor it is that Jesus entrusts us with his lambs out of his love.

This week was M. Isaac Choi’s birthday, he said he turned 57—you can figure that one out. Yet, even at his age he is constantly reading and preparing lectures and traveling around the world with a martyrdom spirit to bless God’s little lambs in all nations. As I’ve watched, God still brings many lambs to his family to care for them. I’m constantly challenged and encouraged by him, not just because of what he does but because he loves Jesus.

One daughter shared that it was not easy growing up as the daughter of a medical missionary. Her father provided medical care in the poorest neighborhoods often

at no cost. So, their family was poor and she couldn't understand why—her dad's a doctor! But she could never forget how much her father loved Jesus. She also went out as a missionary and lives such a wonderful shepherd life and her Bible students look like her children and best friends.

“Again Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ He answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Take care of my sheep’” (16). “Take care” means to care for someone holistically as a person. Taking care, is more than just helping them one time or meeting someone once a week. It means to spend time with them as a child or family member, to care for their needs and be concerned about them simply as a person. The early church literally lived together and shared everything. As a result there were none among them in need and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Act 2:42-47). The word used for fellowship in Acts is “koinonia” a word that expressed the deep love that a Christian community shares. This is what Jesus means by “take care of my sheep.” Taking care is not merely teaching the Bible to someone, it requires sacrifice and commitment. If they are Jesus' sheep we must consider what we will say when he asks how we are taking care of the precious sheep he entrusted to us.

“The third time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep’” (17). It was not a coincidence that Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” since Peter had denied Jesus three times. At that time, he broke down and wept bitterly. His denial was made all the more painful because he really did love Jesus—failures don't mean that we don't love Jesus. But Jesus clearly reminded him of the limitation of Peter's love. So, Peter answered humbly by faith, “Lord YOU know...” Not “I know, I can, I will” but “YOU know that I love you.” Though it hurt, Jesus had to show Peter that he could not put any confidence in his human, emotional love that would fail, but that Peter would have to learn a new way to love him. We need to self-examine: Do I love Jesus in the way he wants me to love? Or am I depending on my high emotion as if it will last forever? Am I working myself ragged thinking that by my own strength I'll prove my love to Jesus? These things will not last. To love Jesus we must rest in the supreme and unconditional love of Jesus until it saturates every part of our being. Then feeding

his sheep flows out of Jesus' love and not our own strength. May God help us to deeply know Jesus' love and deeply love Jesus.

In verses 18-19, Jesus told Peter that feeding his sheep was practically going to lead to his death. Unlike Peter's approach to loving Jesus, this new way of loving him was going to involve Peter practically going where "he did not want to go." Then Jesus said, "Follow me!" The verb "follow" is in the imperative active form. Jesus was commanding him to love him by following his life and dying his death. This is how we love Jesus: when we follow him practically.

In verses 20-23, Jesus taught Peter that we must do the mission that he gives us, without comparing ourselves to others. Peter turned and saw John following—that John always following—and he said, "Lord, what about him?" Don't we all do this? Jesus is leading and challenging us and we say, "What about him?" But in looking at John, Peter took his eyes literally and spiritually off of Jesus. God will tell that other person what to do. We must do what God has asked US to do.

John concludes his book with his eyewitness verification that he told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help him God and that he could have said much, much more, but he didn't have enough paper (24-25)! And that's it the end of John's Gospel—does anyone else feel like you wish he would have just gone ahead and written all those other books?

The life of loving Jesus is full of many failures and disappointments. Many of us were encouraged to feed his sheep while we were still trying to figure it all out and we did so to please people, because it really is the best way for us to grow. But it's inevitable that as we serve God by our own strength we will fall. Maybe you were hurt, maybe you were disappointed or betrayed, maybe you have a wound in your relationship with Jesus and so you've given up reaching out to others, maybe you don't feel you can feed his sheep. Let's hear Jesus' word today, and let's be reminded why we decided to love others and teach others in the first place. It's because we **love** Jesus. Jesus says "feed my lambs," "take care of my sheep." Do you love Jesus?